



The city of Charlevoix, in partnership with WATCH, Inc., a local environmental advocacy group, implemented an "Idle-Free Charlevoix" campaign encouraging motorists to turn off engines while waiting for drawbridge.

Charlevoix the Beautiful (*& the Green*)

By Luke Forrest
21c3 Asset: Green Initiatives

Plentiful natural resources, from beaches to rivers to woodlands, have earned the city of Charlevoix and the surrounding area the nickname "Charlevoix the Beautiful." The city's elected officials, staff and residents collectively understand that maintaining this beauty takes vision, planning, and hard work. As City Manager Rob Straebel describes it, stewardship of natural resources is "an organizational value, something that our city stands for and will continue to promote." This value led the city to be the first community to accept the Michigan Green Communities Challenge, a joint program between the Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan Bureau of Energy Systems, the Michigan Association of Counties, and the Michigan Townships Association. The challenge was created to recognize

and support communities taking steps towards environmental sustainability. Charlevoix's achievements since enrolling in the Challenge and receiving an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) show that a relatively small investment of grant dollars, technical assistance, and staff time can catalyze a broader conversation about a community's environmental impact.

Green Communities Challenge

The decision to enroll in the Challenge, thereby making a public commitment to environmental conservation efforts, led Straebel and the city council to initiate a city-wide Green Team. The Team consists



Left: Heating improvements at the wastewater treatment plant.
Right: Fuel efficient EMS rescue vehicles.

of city department heads and one representative of the general public. While the administration's initial focus was increasing energy efficiency, the community's priorities about a broader range of environmental issues quickly became part of the conversation. Straebel believes

“elevation of those goals have excited our department heads and created more awareness city-wide.”

EECBG—Greening Municipal Operations

The Green Team elected to focus its initial efforts on the development and implementation of an energy improvement plan because it offered the greatest potential for grant funding and short-term improvements in municipal operations. After a comprehensive audit of municipal facilities by a private contractor, Charlevoix targeted three buildings for improvements: city hall, the water treatment plant, and the wastewater treatment plant. Upgrades to the lighting, heating, and ventilation systems in those buildings, funded partially by a \$50,000 EECBG award through the Michigan Economic Recovery Office and the Bureau of Energy Systems, will save an estimated \$13,000 annually. According to Straebel, the city’s investment in these projects has been very well-received by residents. “The economics of the projects make for an easy argument,” he said. “We’re projecting great return on our investments. They will pay for themselves within two or three years, at which point the energy cost savings will have a positive impact on the city budget.”


More Green Projects

Despite limited staff and financial resources, Charlevoix hasn’t stopped there. It has engaged in several ongoing air and water quality initiatives, including “Idle-Free Charlevoix,” which encourages motorists to turn off their engines while waiting at the drawbridge on US Highway 31 (see sidebar). WATCH, Inc. is a local non-profit environmental organization that spearheaded this effort and estimates it is saving 33 gallons of gas per day, along with all the associated air and water pollutants. The city is also working with neighboring Charlevoix Township to develop a non-motorized trail system between Lake Charlevoix, the third-largest inland lake in the state, and Lake Michigan. It purchased small electric vehicles for

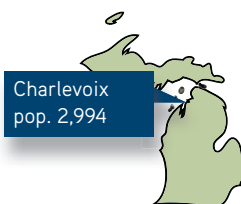


City Manager Rob Straebel with Charlevoix’s new LED street lights.

marina patrol and operations, and is developing a recycling program for its downtown. “Our work is certainly not complete,” Straebel said, “but we’re making great strides.”

Although being a small city creates challenges in terms of capacity to address this wide range of issues, Straebel also believes it gives his city some advantages in managing its environmental impact. “We have a smaller physical area to monitor. It’s easy to communicate within our organization and we can react quickly.” He credits “great department heads who think outside the box” with creating a culture of collaboration and comprehensive ways of thinking. Those ways of thinking include a concern for future generations. Environmental conservation is a shared priority of Charlevoix’s residents, elected officials, and staff—enabling the city to be a leader among Michigan’s Green Communities. 

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Summary of

Charlevoix Green Team’s Goals:

- 1) Revise master plan and recreation plan to address issues such as alternative transportation, environmentally friendly infrastructure, and recruitment of alternative energy industries.
- 2) Implement energy improvement plan for municipal operations.
- 3) Develop a comprehensive recycling and hazardous waste program for residents and businesses.
- 4) Transition to Light Emitting Diodes (LED) for street lights and traffic lights.
- 5) Include Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building principles in new government buildings.
- 6) Expand recycling program at city facilities.
- 7) Expand use of recycled office paper.
- 8) Increase fuel-efficiency and reduce emissions associated with city vehicle fleet.
- 9) Adopt policies to encourage biking and walking.
- 10) Implement both tree removal/trimming and tree planting policies.
- 11) Establish anti-idling policy for city vehicles.
- 12) Expand participation in Green Team.
- 13) Create a comprehensive water quality protection program through regulations, infrastructure improvements, and education.
- 14) Implement an incentive program to replace older air conditioning and refrigeration units.
- 15) Study alternative energy generation options, such as wind and solar.
- 16) Identify and increase protection of sensitive land areas adjacent to water bodies.
- 17) Develop a strategic water conservation education plan.
- 18) Create proper storage for pesticide and fertilizer.